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The Study Abroad Research Context

As a student committed to the value of international exchange, I view my experiences abroad as highlights on a continuum of international education. Throughout my life I have been extremely fortunate to have family support and parents who put the *ex* in *exchange* by opening our home to international influences. This early support helped me focus my undergraduate goals on an International Studies degree, with a focus on African Studies, Anthropology, and Kiswahili, and would launch me into the field of refugee studies and humanitarian aid.

My first direct experience with refugees abroad took place as an undergraduate student at Middlebury College, when I enrolled in a study abroad program in Development Studies in Uganda through The School for International Training. The program included an independent study component designed as a research project in connection with a local humanitarian organization. For the final third of the semester, I interned with a humanitarian organization in charge of managing a Sudanese refugee settlement in Moyo District on the border of Sudan. In this setting I first encountered some of the hopes and realities of refugees in East Africa.

Motivated by this experience, I returned to East Africa to conduct research for my senior thesis at a refugee camp in Tanzania. Studying abroad in Uganda had given me the confidence to apply, successfully, for funding to conduct further research on a topic about which I had become passionate. Continuing my research beyond the classroom walls gave it an invaluable experiential dimension and forced me to think more creatively than ever before. Conducting research abroad was exhilarating, enlightening, and challenging. It filled me with a deep respect for the people who chose to share their knowledge with me.

When I arrived in Tanzania, the first leg of the journey for my thesis research, I questioned how I could apply the concepts I studied for an Anthropological Methods course in the hills of Vermont, or

even the Field Studies Seminar I had completed nearby in Kampala. After settling in, I came into contact, for the first time, with the government's institutionalized fear of researchers from wealthy nations. I spent my waking hours traversing the bureaucratic mazes of the Tanzanian government's refugee policies. Thanks to much assistance and good advice from various humanitarian agencies, I finally set off from *Bongoland*—the vernacular for Dar-es-Salaam as metaphorical brain of the country—for Kigoma Region, the landing point for most Congolese living in Tanzania, and Lugufu Refugee Camp there.

I wasn't sure that I was in the right place, until the first night in Lugufu camp, when the pumping drum rhythms and blood-stirring guitar riffs of live Congolese *soukous* music hung in the air, heavy with smoke from the nearby bush fires. In what I would come to understand to be a daily ritual, the Lugufu Live Band played, its sounds reminding us of our humanity. We were not in any ordinary place of refuge. We were sad, we were hungry, we were guilty, we were angry, and we were all different—but we were alive and dancing.



Wakimbizi Etching, 2003

Nipe Nikupe: Dependency, Reciprocity, and Paradoxes of Food Aid in Lugufu Refugee Camp Kigoma, Tanzania

Nipe Nikupe:

'Give Me so that I Give You'

This paper is based on primary fieldwork conducted in Lugufu refugee camp in the rural Kigoma Region of western Tanzania. It is an anthropological inquiry into the paradox of refugee food aid based on the prevailing dynamic of domination and submission currently advanced by the international aid community. This inquiry asks fundamental questions relating to the social consequences of refugee food aid. How does the power of gift and reciprocity relate to food aid? What is the strategic value of this aid to the provider? What is expected of an individual who enters the liminal social setting of the refugee camp, as a recipient of humanitarian assistance? How does dependency develop and manifest itself in Lugufu refugee camp? From these points of analysis emerges a strong critique of the current relief regime, and constructive criticism aimed at improving food distribution in this highly dynamic social setting—a situation in which the contribution of a fresh perspective can offer a valuable tool for positive change.

Dunia Duara: the Cycle of Violence in the Congo

Dunia duara is a Kiswahili¹ proverb which translates as 'the world is round,' and implies the English saying, "What goes around comes around." In the Congo, people are caught in a cycle of conflict, competition, and displacement in which the answer to one atrocity seems to be an even greater evil. Relationships of domination and submission are some of the most salient themes of the Congo's history. Throughout the Congo's turbulent past, elites have drawn their power from the Congo's natural and human resources. In the 19th century when colonialism and the 'scramble for Africa' became central to European politics, European explorers and traders laid claim to the coastal regions, and colonization instigated native dependence on outside sources of livelihood. At the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885, United States and other colonial powers recognized King Leopold II of Belgium's claim over the Congo, which came to be a major supplier of raw materials for the rapidly industrializing western world (Hochschild, 1998; Shillington, 1995).

During the 1950s and 1960s, the fervor of the Pan-African movement, aimed at promoting African unity and increasing political and economic ties between African states, spread across the continent. Demands for independence grew louder. Demonstrations and riots intensified in the Belgian Congo, and the Belgians granted the Congolese independence on June 30, 1960. The new state crumbled under the pressure from various regionally-based political parties and the debate over the need for a centralized, federal system of government surged (Shillington, 1995). The optimism of the independence era gave way to the realities of post-colonial life.

When Mobutu seized power in a coup in 1965, he, too, used the Congo as a means for personal enrichment, giving rise to a rule of extreme corruption, often referred to as a 'kleptocracy.' Mobutu's renaming of the country as Zaïre was followed by a rapid nationalization campaign (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2002, p.147). Mobutu and his cronies became the sole beneficiaries of Zaïre's riches and the resulting fiscal crisis rendered the state unable to provide basic services to the citizens. Recognizing Central Africa's strategic geopolitical location in the Cold War, Mobutu adopted an anti-communist stance, making Zaïre a key ally of the West and a top recipient of foreign aid. Western patrons, led by the United States, rewarded Mobutu's anti-communist stance with \$448 million worth of aid in 1986 alone (Reno, 1998, p.151). Although Mobutu publicly promoted a rejection of Western alliances, going so far as to ban Western dress to demonstrate loyalty and promote his ideology of "authenticity," he continued to exploit support from other governments. As financial resources subsided at the end of the Cold War, so Mobutu was unable to satisfy huge patronage networks with funds and services. As a result, privatization soon replaced most remnants of the "authenticity" campaign. The dictator encouraged competition between rival elites hoping to reduce the likelihood of these factions attacking his own powerful position (Reno, 1998, p.148). Mobutu also continued to manipulate symbols of nationalism and ethnicity for his own political survival, solidifying the foundations for the current conflict enveloping the region.

The increasing tensions that led to the genocide of 1994 are best understood in terms of the powerful roles of ethnic identity and subnationalism in the Congo. In the ethnic mosaic of Eastern Congo ethnic identity holds political significance. Ethnicity in the Eastern Congo is culturally constructed and often politically motivated. In North and South Kivu, manipulation of identity politics by local elites has resulted in the murder of hundreds of thousands of people by their own neighbors and by indoctrinated armies.

The instrumentalist school of thought argues that ethnic identity in Rwanda and Eastern Congo is evolutionary in nature and malleable to the point that people can have multiple identities depending on the ends they seek. For example, the Congolese Banyarwanda derive their ancestry from both the Tutsi and Hutu of Rwanda. Following the Revolution of 1959 and the 1972 massacres in Burundi, many Tutsi Banyarwanda in South Kivu attempted to distance themselves from the Tutsi of Rwanda and Burundi by integrating into the Tutsi Banyamulenge people, a Kinyarwanda-speaking minority group territorially identified as those living in the hills of Mulenge, South Kivu (Mamdani, 2001). This move to disassociate from an ancestral homeland was performed by the Banyamulenge in response to the passage of the 1981 Citizenship Bill. This law stipulated that, “only those persons who could demonstrate an ancestral connection to the population residing in 1885 in the territory then demarcated as Congo would qualify to be citizens of Congo” (Mamdani, 2001, p.244). Consequently, as of the late 1990s, the word “Banyamulenge” has come to represent a generic term for all Congolese Tutsi (Mamdani, 2001, p. 258).

When the Ugandan-based Revolutionary Patriotic Front² (RPF) forces swept across Rwanda in mid-1994, they seized the central government from the conservative Hutu regime. Within one week, over two million Rwandese fled the country, more than half crossing into North and South Kivu in Congo (Mamdani, 2001, p. 234). Ultimately, the displacement and military movements in the post-genocide era compounded the aggression of latent conflicts when Hutu extremist forces responsible for masterminding and carrying out the genocide, known as the *interahamwe*,³ managed to flee Rwanda without punishment assisted by the French armed invasion Operation Turquoise. When 500,000 Rwandan refugees settled in camps in Eastern Congo in 1994, the humanitarian agencies were unable to distinguish between the victims of war and the very perpetrators of the genocide. In these camps, food became a powerful currency controlled by killers and a source of strength for the reorganizing armies.

In Congo, the Banyamulenge, Tutsi Banyarwanda, local RDC supporters, and other anti-government groups joined together in a rebel offensive supported by the Rwandan and Burundian governments known as the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (AFDL). Local elite Laurent Kabila led the AFDL, commanding its October 1996 advance on the capital from Eastern Congo, and terrorizing civilians as they traversed the nation. By May of 1997, the AFDL reached Kinshasa, toppled

Mobutu's regime and installed Kabila as president of the renamed Democratic Republic of the Congo (MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga, 2000). Ironically, Kabila's allies in Rwanda and Uganda recognized this as an opportunity to control Eastern Congo's valuable resource trade, and they turned on Kabila once he assumed the presidency (Chrétien, 2003). Kabila's anti-government campaign came back to haunt him—*dunia duara*: he was assassinated the following year.

The complexities of war in the Congo run deeper than the rich veins of minerals found in the soil there. Misleading representations of the Congo's fall into a state of war and anarchy proliferate in Western media. Some reports on the conflict point to racist "primordial" explanations, citing the violent tendencies "inherent" in particular ethnicities. Other reports point to the power vacuum created after decolonization as an explanation for the various disputes across the region. In Congo, the Gross Domestic Product, sectoral growth rates, and statistics of purchasing power show the rapid decline of infrastructure and social services over the past few decades. However, these institutional indicators do not necessarily reflect local realities in the Congo, and cannot be considered as reliable economic explanations for the cycle of civil war (Bayart, Ellis and Hibou, 1999). The Congolese refugees themselves reveal the social reasons of the conflict. While each Congolese refugee in Tanzania has his or her own motivation for fleeing, they list common factors pushing them to leave the Congo as including the violent rule of powerful elites, manipulation of ethnic identity, land scarcity, natural resource exploitation, and the erosion of national institutions and infrastructure.

In Eastern Congo, the consequences of colonization, identity politics, and natural resource extraction have placed millions in a vulnerable state in the midst of a complex humanitarian crisis. As a result of violence and institutional failure, hundreds of thousands in Eastern Congo remain displaced; 95,000 of them have settled in Lugufu refugee camp in Tanzania with the hope for a better life.

Entering the Liminal Sphere

Ni muda mrefu tumeisha nawe pamoja.

Tisini na saba badi leo, isikidogo...

It has been a long time we have lived together with you.

'97 until today, is not small...

— “Adamo,” The Lugufu Live Band, 2003

The Dynamics of a Refugee Camp

Since the onset of the conflict in South Kivu, thousands of displaced Congolese have risked the difficult passage across Lake Tanganyika. When those with the means to make the journey from the Congo arrive by *dhow* at the fishing camp Kibirizi, they enter a liminal space. As these individuals and families, from a diversity of backgrounds, seek refuge under the Geneva Convention, they submit to a new hierarchy of authority on Tanzanian soil, where the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) and partner organizations become parent, spouse, judge, provider, protector, and primary benefactor.

According to my interviews in Lugufu camp, most refugees came to Tanzania for one of three reasons. The minority cited a desire to escape violence in Eastern Congo as the reason for flight. Although I heard many gruesome stories of persecution, brutality, and murdered loved ones, most interviewees did not cite the physical violence of war as the reason for leaving. The more common response was that a refugee came to join a family member already living in the camp. Chain migration is common in Lugufu: family members arrive in succession as funding for the passage becomes available. The most common motivation for leaving the Congo for Lugufu concerned the effects of war on the country's infrastructure and institutional effectiveness. In the Congo, most citizens are denied access to basic social services such as education and healthcare. Institutional erosion caused many individuals to gather resources from their extended families and set off for Tanzania in search of opportunity in a nation with a comparatively well-functioning public sector. The Lugufu refugees made their way to Tanzania having heard that education and healthcare were free in the Tanzanian camps.

I spoke with one young man, as he stood in the shade beside his tarnished Chinese bicycle, waiting for the next customer who would pay up to one hundred Tanzanian shillings (ten US cents) for his taxi service between Lugufu I and Lugufu II. When this man came to Lugufu in 1999, he expected to find many job opportunities. Upon arrival he found the only employment available in the camp was provided by unsteady casual labor illegally commissioned by

Tanzanian agriculturalists surrounding the camp, or informal jobs within the camp, such as operating a bicycle taxi service.

Another man I interviewed was disappointed to discover, after making his way hundreds of kilometers to Lugufu from Kisangani, that the secondary school he hoped to attend was not universally free. Unfortunately, before he could get word back home of his misguided expectations, his brother followed in his footsteps. Now, the brothers work in an illegal market, saving money from their trade in Congolese and Burundese textiles in order to return home. The older brother explained to me that Lugufu camp is “a hole for the Congoman.” According to his account, there was not enough food and business opportunities were bleak. All of an individual’s energy must be focused on finding enough food, and therefore if he or she does not have an extended family support network, saving sufficient capital to make the journey home is unlikely. Although every refugee had personal motivations for fleeing the Congo, they shared a common fate: the vast majority had scraped together sufficient funds to pay for the passage across the lake but could not amass the fare to return home.

The Geography of Displacement

When “new arrivals,” as they are dubbed in humanitarian aid jargon, complete the middle passage crossing Lake Tanganyika to Kibirizi, they are taken for “processing” to the reception center in the nearby palm grove adjacent to the beach. The center resembles a cattle ranch covered in tarpaulin, finished with corrals as holding areas. Imposing gates, fences, and funneling chutes direct people through a maze of plastic sheeting. Inside this aging “temporary” structure, processing starts with registration and collection of personal data under the auspices of the UNHCR in coordination with the Tanzanian Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA). The center becomes a home for the new arrivals for up to one month, until they are resettled in a nearby camp. In Kibirizi refugees are given their first distribution of food.

Kibirizi is almost 100 kilometers from Lugufu refugee camp. The camp, currently home to over 92,000 Congolese was established in 1997 when the government of Tanzania designated land in Kigoma District for it.⁴ Although this region has one of the poorest economies and weakest physical infrastructures in the country, Lugufu was strategically positioned between the Malagarasi River to the west and the Lugufu Railway Siding along the Dar-es-Salaam route to the east. Lugufu is located on a semi-arid plateau approximately ten kilometers from the western branch of the Great Rift Valley. During the dry season, the dirt tracks crisscrossing the camp are layered with an ever-present powdery red dust.

Lugufu camp is divided into Lugufu I and II for administrative purposes, and further subdivided into zone, village, block, and plot units. The main Kigoma-Uvinza road cuts Lugufu into two sections: to the south is Lugufu I and II where all refugees reside, to the north, less than one kilometer away, there is a distinct round hill, known as the "Compound." The Compound hosts an assortment of NGO offices and employee housing, enclosed by a tall barbed-wire fence. The physical division is especially visible at night, after the 6:00 pm curfew when all non-refugee employees stay within the Compound enclosure and all refugees are obligated to be within the camp boundaries. The Compound, perched above the sprawling expanse of Lugufu, hosts the largest collection of generator-powered lights and satellite televisions within a one hundred kilometer radius. In the camp below, small cooking fires illuminate steadily rising columns of smoke.

The clear geographic separation of Lugufu mirrors the separation apparent in the social spheres of influence. According to Hyndman, "The social hierarchy of refugees, NGO personnel, and UN staff is spatialized in distinct and segregated spaces" (Hyndman, 2000, p. xviii). The spatialization of the social hierarchy of the camp is reified during the twice-monthly food distribution. At the distribution site, a physical barrier is drawn between the refugee world and the world of the aid agency during the distribution process. Food group leaders representing a collection of equally sized families enter the distribution site, assigned to a "food chute" according to family size, where they interact directly with an employee of the aid agency. The family-head presents the ration card, mandatory for obtaining the biweekly food ration, and revered as the individual's most important possession. The aid worker is almost always younger than the male head of family collecting the rations. Once the family group's rations were doled out to the family's leader, women family members would enter the distribution area, and carry the food sacks to the other side of the barrier for further subdivision.

Along with this literal separation during the food distribution process, refugees live with constant reminders that they are beneficiaries of aid. Lugufu camp is inundated with symbolic reminders of the original donor nation. For example, in Lugufu refugee camp USAID (United States Agency for International Development) vegetable oil cans are distributed and reused in a multitude of fashions. Some families construct metal doors to their houses with flattened oil cans, others cut and sculpt them into small cooking stoves. Empty grain bags also proliferate in the camp, traded as roof construction material or storage devices. A large donation of fabric by a Danish aid organization made

its particular pattern the most popular material worn by men and women of all ages, strikingly distinguishable because of the organization's insignia printed on nearly every fold. The symbolic presence of the refugee relief regime is ubiquitous to the point that refugee children are raised surrounded by the emblems of USAID, ECHO (European Community Humanitarian Office), and a variety of other international aid organizations.

On the second day of food distribution in Lugufu, I approached a mother of five who had been joking all day about taking the empty maize meal sacs. Once she realized I had no authority to give her the sacs, she talked openly with me. When I asked her if she knew who was giving this food to the UN for distribution, she explained to me that the food came from America as a gift for the Congolese. She went on to explain that her children, three of whom were born in the camp, enjoyed crafting their toys out of the empty oil cans and competing with each other to get the section with USA written on it in bold letters. In a society where notions of America as a land of milk and honey do not come from a cunning mass media, the symbolic value of a name like USA, America, or European Community printed on nearly every guarded family possession is a powerful element in the formation of a self-history as a construct of the camp experience.

The benefactor-beneficiary relationship is most clear during the food distribution process, when food rations are physically handed over to refugees. In exchange for the food gift, refugees are obliged to abide by the set of rules and regulations set forth by donor agencies and Government of Tanzania. If it is discovered that a refugee is breaking any of these prescribed rules, his or her ration card is confiscated and they no longer are included in the beneficiary category. During this biweekly ritualized exchange of obedience, dignity, and sometimes labor for food items, a representative of the food "donor," physically measures and gives the "gift" of food. This aid worker maintains the greatest authority as a representative of the MHA, UNHCR, Tanzanian Red Cross Society (TRCS), and WFP. According to the rhetoric used by the employees of these aid agencies, refugees and refugee institutions in Lugufu are considered "beneficiaries" during these exchanges, while the agencies and employees working in Lugufu are considered the "benefactors" and representatives of the donor.

I often asked interviewees if they thought they were exchanging the rights and entitlements of citizenship for the benefits of living in the camp. Most of the people I asked would laugh and then proceed to talk about something completely different. The few who chose to answer this question were



"Huko ni Compound" Etching, 2003

men. They were mostly fathers of multiple children, and in a position of leadership in the camp. One man explained that I should modify my question since there were no tangible entitlements to citizenship in the Congo. For many, the only important right of being a "Congoman" was the music—but *soukous* can travel almost anywhere.

Initially, it was surprising that most refugees who talked about what they were giving up were men who occupied positions of relative power in the camp. After many days, one robust man explained that, "Us men, we have lost our power at home." He explained that because he could not work in Tanzania, he could no longer provide anything substantial for his family. Another young man working as a volunteer teacher said, "Food distribution in the family is not sufficient to the people and because of this shortage of food family do not live in a good harmony. For example, it leads to misunderstanding between even the husband with his wife. Communities do not have power in these situations." These men were not atypical in their responses as most pointed to dissension in their family or community. Food as one of the most important variables in the social hierarchy equation reflects the larger polarization which takes place on a regional geographic scale.

Gifts, Contracts, and Humanitarian Aid

A Maussian Perspective on Public Law 480

In Marcel Mauss' ethnographic analysis of Samoan and Maori society, he argues that exchanges take place as a contractual obligation of reciprocity between representatives of a collective, rather than as a voluntary act of gift giving between individuals:

Souls are mixed with things; things with souls. Lives are mingled together, and this is how among persons and things so intermingled, each emerges from their own sphere and mixes together. This is precisely what contract and exchange are (1950, p. 20).

Mauss also asserts that there is an inherent power in the thing given, which compels the receiver to reciprocate the gift. Today, a similar power structure exists in the provision of food aid to people in poor countries, including in refugee camps. According to Mauss: "Charity is still wounding for him who has accepted it, and the whole tendency of our morality is to strive to do away with the unconscious and injurious patronage of the rich almsgiver" (1950, p. 65).

In Mauss' explanation of gift giving and exchange he uses the *potlatch* ceremony of the American Northwest. The potlatch is a highly developed form of "total services" suggesting an obligation to give as well as receive (1950). To Mauss, the potlatch is juridical, religious, mythological, economic, and a phenomenon of social structure, not unlike the role of food aid in Lugufu refugee camp (1950, p. 38). For millions of refugees living in camps throughout the world, charity is regularly received in the form of food. For many, these meager rations barely suffice in nourishing the body, yet the metaphysical power of this gift is immense. The following section considers the non-nutritional harms and benefits of food aid beginning on the global scale and eventually narrows to focus on Lugufu refugee camp in Tanzania.

In 1954, the US Congress passed the Agricultural Trade Development and Assistance Act (later known as Public Law 480, or the "Food for Peace" program), institutionalizing food aid from the U.S. to foreign countries. When President Eisenhower signed the bill into law on July 10, 1954, he stated that Public Law 480 would establish a foundation "...for a permanent expansion of our exports of agricultural products, with lasting benefits to ourselves and peoples of other lands" (Ruttan, 1993, p. 7). The hypothesis that food aid is egocentric rather than altruistic may seem paradoxical, critics of food aid have vocalized this concern for decades. As quoted in Garrett Hardin's essay,

"Lifeboat Ethics: A Malthusian View," the headline in *Forbes* magazine when P.L. 480 passed read: "Feeding the World's Hungry Millions: How it Will Mean Billions for U.S. Business" (1980, p. 175). Hardin points to the commercial roots of international food assistance, yet the political motivations of this humanitarian attempt are more overpowering. In the 1980's, Hartmann and Boyce witnessed the harmful effects of food aid in Bangladesh:

At first glance, the logic behind food aid seems simple and compelling: if people are hungry, give them food. The United States produces vast surpluses of food; the government even pays farmers not to grow more. Why not use this agricultural abundance to feed the millions around the world who suffer from malnutrition? Unfortunately, this humanitarian logic is often undermined by political realities. (1985, p. 274)

In this view, food aid exchanged bilaterally, and between states and international organizations such as the UN, becomes a political tool.

Harriet Friedmann approaches food politics in the international system with a focus on aid and dependency. She views food aid as an unhealthy "relationship" between stakeholders; that is, between import dependence by the recipient nation and export dependence by the donor nation (1990, p.14). This unhealthy relationship is often exacerbated in situations involving refugees. For example, the high number of people seeking refuge in Tanzania is considered a burden for the country, for which the government needs relief from donor nations to cope. In an article in Issue 1 of the *Red Cross Red Crescent Magazine* 2003, the organization claims that the presence of some 670,000 refugees in Tanzania has become an "immense burden, especially in the Kigoma area, where they make up one-third of the population." In the same article, Adam Konbisa, Tanzanian Red Cross General Secretary, explains that, "... (Europeans) think refugees are a big burden. Yes, they are, but still we have an obligation to receive them.... But we definitely need support from outside." Such appeals arm food aid advocates and politicians in donor nations with the moral authority to continue programs such as P.L. 480.

In *The Food Question: Profit versus People*, Ben Crow focuses directly on the conditionality of food aid, asserting that food aid has caused a shift in the global system from state control, "towards greater reliance on private ownership and distribution" (1990, p. 40). Crow calls this conditionality of food aid a form of imperialism, which brings the capitalist "First World" powers into influential positions over the politics of "Third World" states. In Crow's discussion of the negative effects of food aid on the "Third World," he proposes

that the motivation for such aid comes from one state's desire to determine the policy of another state, and that the establishment of democratic institutions and integration into the capitalist system is a primary motivation of the donor state. Crow outlines how aid can become a localized political tool. His critical stance on food aid views food aid as it is transformed into a political tool, and generally used to meet the wishes of the donor.

Upon establishment of P.L. 480, there were numerous aims of institutionalizing food aid. According to Friedmann, the origins of U.S. food aid can be attributed to four main factors: the collapse of European export markets in the 1930s and 1940s, the growing U.S. wheat surpluses resulting from New Deal farm policies, decolonization, and the drive to spread capitalist ideologies during the Cold War. In providing food aid, America was able to integrate "Third World agrarian societies into the capitalist sphere of the world economy" (Friedmann, p. 16).

Farmers, businessmen, and politicians celebrated the new food assistance program for a simple reason captured in an American expression: "It is better to give than to receive." In East Africa, a similar Kiswahili phrase is used as an inverse of the American saying. *Nipe nikupe* means, "I get and therefore I give." These two linguistic idioms reflect the structure of aid exchanged from North America to various countries in Africa. The inference is identical while the order of subjects is reversed, thus matching the primary role of giver or receiver to the person uttering the phrase.

The International Refugee Regime

When James T. Morris, Executive Director of the WFP, delivered his statement to the United Nations Security Council in New York on April 8, 2003, he stated that the WFP was currently feeding 1.8 million refugees and 5.7 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Africa. He estimated that the operating expenses in Africa alone cost close to \$166 million. The WFP is the largest international agency providing food to refugees. In fact, most food donated to refugee relief operations by the US government is given under Title II of P.L. 480 via the WFP or another relief agency working together with the UN agencies. The specialized international agencies and organizations such as these responsible for providing assistance to displaced people around the world make up what is referred to as the international refugee relief regime. It is useful to consider refugee relief in the context of an international regime because it allows for the examination of state actors working together with governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

In Tanzania, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) protects refugees, while coordination of refugee relief falls under the auspices of The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and its implementing partners such as the Red Cross and WFP. Established by the 1950 UN General Assembly and guided by agreements such as the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, the UNHCR is the most politically and financially powerful actor in the international refugee relief regime and therefore exercises great influence upon camp management, budgeting, and allocation of resources.

In the case of food aid distributed to refugees within UN sanctioned camps, the majority of aid is procured from Western European nations, the United States, Canada, and Japan. Tanzanian refugee camps receive all food aid from foreign states through the WFP. Once the food is handed over to the implementing partner, distributions generally take place biweekly with each refugee receiving an equal ration. This is where food aid moves from the macro-level to the micro-level: refugees living in Tanzania only have contact with the employees of the UNHCR, WFP, and other implementing partners such as the TRCS, but the actual packaging of the food carries symbols or names of the original donor nations

The Universal Refugee

In providing relief in refugee-affected areas, the international refugee regime universalizes refugees in order to create a clear distinction between refugees and all other individuals in the affected area. Perhaps this mode of forced homogenization is rooted in the professional language of the regime, which uses a vocabulary promoting the entitlements of universal and equal subjects coupled with the fear of differentiating between genders, ethnicities, language groups, and social classes. Anthropologist Liisa Malkki provides one example of such language used by the international refugee regime:

This humanistic universalization of “the refugee” as an embodiment of pure humanity (and as a pure victim) is suggested in the following words by the Refugee Secretary of the All-Africa Council of Churches, Melaku Kifle: “It is the refugee who reveals to us the defective society in which we live. He is a kind of mirror through whose suffering we can see the injustice, the oppression and the maltreatment of the powerless by the powerful” (cited in Oxfam America 1984:1).

One possible source for this universalizing vocabulary is the desire of the regime to keep its position as provider and benefactor. In taking away an individual’s identity, the individual is also stripped of his or her own means of

survival, making the utterly dependent. As writer and journalist Michael Ignatieff states:

There is no such thing as love of the human race, only the love of this person or that, in this time and not in any other... The problem is not to defend universality, but to give these abstract individuals the chance to become real, historical individuals again, with the social relations and the power to protect themselves.... The people who have no homeland must be given one; they cannot depend on the uncertain and fitful protection of a world conscience defending them as examples of the universal abstraction Man. (1985)

Once in the context of a refugee camp, an individual becomes an abstract body in the eyes of the relief regime. When refugees depend on the protection of aid agencies, their ability to protect themselves shifts from the power inherent in familial and community obligations, to the protection given by aid agencies. Unfortunately, the security provided by aid agencies is not everlasting because the agencies are directed and driven by greater political forces along with the erratic donations of individuals, organizations, and states.

A example of the process of universalization in the camp setting occurs during exchanges between refugees and employees of aid agencies. Refugees are rarely referred to by their names. Instead, during activities such as food distribution, an individual's ration card is considered the primary form of identification. The size of a business card, every individual designated as a refugee holds an identical card issued by the UNHCR bearing the ration number for that individual and his or her dependents. These small plastic cards symbolize the homogenization of refugees within the camp. The cards illustrate how policies that discount the identity of an individual can silence important aspects of diversity and difference within the population.

Inevitably, the question is raised as to what the consequences of this homogenization are in the setting of a camp. According to Hyndman, universalization is the regime's method of ordering disorder. She points out a fundamental contradiction in the managing mechanisms of the international refugee regime when she asks: "At what point do charitable acts of humanitarian assistance become neocolonial technologies of control? The line is fine" (2000, p. 147). In many cases, refugees are represented in decision-making situations; however, ultimately they are also confined to a bounded physical space, tight labor laws, and the power of the aid agencies. In the case of Lugufu refugee camp, regardless of an individual's social status in the Congo, once

their name is recorded in the database at the entry point in Tanzania, the individual becomes an equal to all other refugees before the eyes of the UNHCR as the “beneficiary” of an international relief operation. The universalization of the refugee and the subsequent homogenization of Congolese living in Lugufu provide the foundation for the social code prevailing within the camp.

In Mauss’ account of gift-giving as well as in the refugee scenario, when goods are exchanged between collectives, competition, loss of spiritual essence, and strict hierarchies form. Mauss alludes to the formation of dependency in relation to gift-giving:

...minor acts of expiation (are) carried out. This is because the bond established between donor and recipient is too strong for both of them...they are too closely linked with one another. The recipient puts himself in a position of dependence vis-à-vis the donor. (1950, p. 59)

There is a danger inherent in gift-receiving, as the refugee scenario clearly demonstrates. When words employed by aid agencies fail to acknowledge differences, they also risk ignoring important changing social hierarchies within the collective recipients.

Conclusion: Receiving / Conceding No More

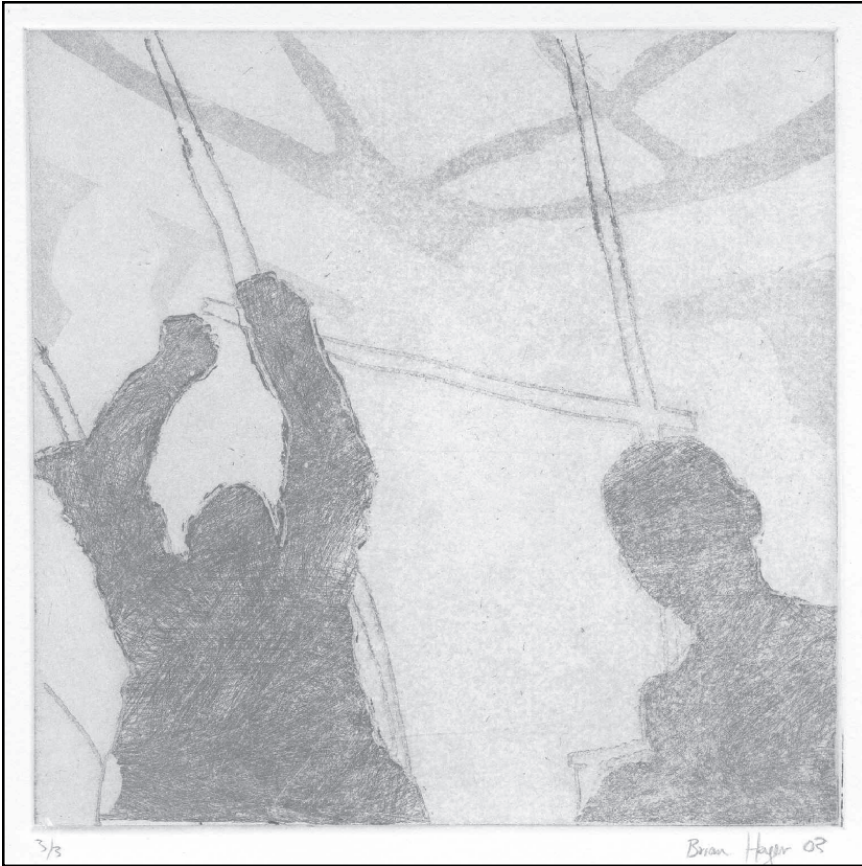
The camp was a locus of hierarchical, asymmetrical power in which the overwhelming numerical majority of inhabitants, the refugee, were subject to the authority of the small minority of the Tanzanian administrators. This minority controlled important aspects of the refugees’ economic and social lives and was experienced as exploitative and illegitimate.

— Liisa Malkki, *Purity and Exile* (1995, p. 235)

Kila kibaya kina uzuri wake. Every bad thing has its good side.

— Kiswahili saying

The power relationship established during the food distribution defines the universal refugee as deprived and in need of assistance from outsiders. The cycle of dependency created in this relationship is unbounded and never-ending so long as the exchange that binds refugees to the international relief regime fails to adapt to local realities. The implications of this relationship lie at the very core of my investigation into refugee food aid. The institution of and the need for food aid will never become obsolete. Although humanitarian aid is



"Maendeleo" Etching, 2003

necessary during emergencies, providing aid in protracted cases seldom works to solve the root causes of displacement, there is an immediate need for a drastic change in the way food aid in general, and refugee food aid in particular, is carried out. The international refugee relief regimes must acknowledge the dilemma of providing for immediate welfare without considering a community's future welfare. Once the international refugee regime and the stakeholders worldwide reorient their conception of food aid and its effects to account more for the recipients of aid, assistance will prove a positive influence. People socialized in donor nations must understand the perspective of the recipient and should question whose interests the assistance is serving: those of the giver or those of the receiver. Jennifer Hyndman uses the term "colonialism of compassion" to describe the danger of humanitarian work, namely that it can function similarly to colonialism, despite a wealth of good intentions.

Mahmood Mamdani approaches the legacy of colonialism from the institutional perspective. In *Citizen and Subject*, Mamdani writes, “Precisely because deracialization has marked the limits of postcolonial reform, the nonracial legacy of colonialism needs to be brought out into the open so that it may be the focus of a public discussion” (1996, p. 4). Indications of this nonracial colonial legacy are present in the doling out of food aid to refugees. The physical and metaphysical power of food for displaced peoples without effective subsistence strategies renders the distribution process the critical point of interaction between aid givers and receivers. Distribution then becomes a space where the common currency of food supports a hierarchy of power.

Food assistance operates analogously to the exchange of a gift. Actors in the exchange are both local and international, they represent individuals as well as groups, and the material exchanged varies from week to week, and from group to group. In general, exchanges are not only of goods and services, but also of labor, obedience, and rights. As seen in Lugufu refugee camp, the distribution process in the camp is a deeply meaningful nexus of power dynamics in the destabilized society of the camp. Looking at food distribution in this specific context provides insight into the social implications of food aid at both regional and global scales. It is critical to identify the social factors that ultimately shape responses to displacement.

The art of humanitarianism is in a constant state of change. In 2003, the UNHCR headquarters in Geneva finalized plans to ship retinal scanners to Lugufu refugee camp. These scanners are meant to replace the ration card system, and to establish a more accurate refugee profile database. In this scenario, when a refugee’s identity becomes a series of codes based on a retinal scan, the individual sacrifices his or her personal identity to that of an electronic refugee identity. The dehumanizing effects of efficiency are visible in the individual’s loss of personal and moral responsibility, and in the possible entrenchment of dependency.

The practicality of a global mandate calling for equality among refugees and similar food distribution modules around the world for the purpose of sustaining donor interest in refugee relief worldwide is easily understood. However, aid agencies interacting directly with refugees must recognize and operate within the local conception of differences, rather than implementing policies which result in the homogenization of the diverse refugee population. It is important to acknowledge the differences that exist in the camp setting in order to work within this framework and avoid creating a shadow world of displacement. The international refugee regime must strive for a greater understanding of cultural logic in each refugee situation. The most

effective way to bring about this understanding would be to return the decision making power to the individuals living in the camp. Participation of all stakeholders in the decision making process, will lead to positive change, and ultimately the refugee's sustained liminal state could transform into a stage for solving conflict in the homeland and initiating reconciliation.

The Congo is a land bursting with paradox. Even at times of the greatest hardship, people in Lugufu find a way to move their bodies to *soukous* beats. It is my hope that the tragedy of displacement will prove to be one of the greatest strengths in the Congo's slow reconstruction. Distanced from the severe competition for resources and networks of elite alliances cultivated in the Eastern Congo, refugees in Lugufu camp are united in a unique environment and contribute important perspectives on the causes and solutions to conflict in their homeland. When refugees are allowed to live with dignity, the strengthened social fabric of the community can support the quest for solutions to the Congo's problems by the Congolese.

Notes

¹ Kiswahili is a common trade language spoken by millions throughout the Great Lakes Region of Africa.

² Leading up to the genocide in 1994, the RPF was an army primarily made up of Rwandan exiles living in Uganda. Current Rwandan President Paul Kagame was a leader of RPF forces during the advance on Kigali in 1994.

³ The *interhamwe* were an extremist Hutu militia who worked together with the Forces Armées Rwandaises (FAR) and the national army to carrying out the majority of the killings during the Rwandan genocide. In Kinyarwanda, *interhamwe* means 'those who work together' (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002:223).

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Postscript

Editor's note: Brian was unable to provide a Postscript as he is currently an AmeriCares emergency-response worker stationed in Mississippi as part of the response to Hurricane Katrina. A firsthand account of his experiences may be found at: www.americares.org/news/?id=102

